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HISTORICAL SERMON

Delivered at Ware First Parish,

ON

Thanksgiving Day, Dec. 2d, 1830,

By AUGUSTUS B. REED,

Pastor of the First Congregational Church
in Ware, Mass.,

AND NOW FIRST PRINTED.

1889.



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"With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands."—*Jacob*.

"O, give thanks unto the Lord; call upon His name; make known His deeds among the people."—*Psalms cv., 1.*

God has revealed himself as the Creator and Supreme Governor of the world. He has taught us that His Providence is particular and universal. Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. A sparrow shall not fall on the ground without your Father. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. We are, therefore, to look upon all the events that transpire under His holy government as that which He has wrought, either by His own immediate agency, or by the instrumentality of His creatures. It would be delightful on an occasion like the present to contemplate the Lord of the whole earth as having from the beginning pervaded immensity, moving for-

ward all His vast designs in the plenitude of His strength and wisdom. And to this the text, taken in its natural sense, would lead us. But it appears, from the connection in which it stands, that the primary object of the Psalmist, in the passage before us, was to call the attention of the Israelites to the Providence of God towards them in particular, from the call of Abraham to their settlement in the land of Canaan.

God had raised them from a single family to a great and prosperous people. The pious Psalmist wished, therefore, to lead them to a grateful and prayerful remembrance of the particular blessing they had received. This is, indeed, a duty incumbent on every community. It becomes us no less than it did the Israelites to mark well the Providences in which God has been pleased to pass before us.

Permit me, then, my beloved people, to call your attention to-day to the operations of the divine hand in this town. With a design to lead you to consider what God has wrought, and by this means to excite within you a spirit of thanksgiving and prayer, I shall, in this discourse, give a brief history of this town, from its settlement to the present time.

The principal part of Ware, a territory of ten thousand acres, it is said was originally granted to a company from Narragansett as a reward for their expelling the Indians from this section of country.

This company, it appears, did not consider the land granted to them by government as worthy of much attention, as they soon after sold it to John Reed, Esq., of Boston, for two coppers an acre. This proprietor let a great part of it, for a number of years, to such persons as were disposed to hire rough, uncultivated country. The tenants were in the habit of burning over the land annually, to prepare it for the large herds of cattle which they were accustomed to receive every Summer from the more easterly part of the colony.

This practice greatly injured the soil and retarded very considerably the settlement of the territory. The number of families, however, gradually increased and many of them soon became owners of the soil. On the 26th of May, 1742, a petition was drafted and signed by John Reed, of Boston, and by Thomas Marsh and twenty-nine others, inhabitants of this territory, to be presented to the General Court, praying that the land described in the petition, which was nearly the same as that now included in the limits of the town, should be incorporated into a distinct township, or into a parish, that they might "lawfully erect and maintain the public worship of God among them." This petition was read in court on the 2d of June in the same year and recommitted. The members of this committee were directed to examine the subject and report as soon as practicable. After visit-

ing the district and inquiring into the circumstances of the case, the committee reported as their opinion that the petitioners were not sufficient to be incorporated as a town, but were further of opinion that the inhabitants of the territory described ought to be freed from all taxes to any other place or town, during the pleasure of the General Court, so that they might be able to provide preaching among themselves. This report was read in court and accepted, on the 4th of December following, "whereupon it was ordered that the lands within the limits described and the inhabitants therein be erected into a precinct, and that the said inhabitants have the powers and privileges which other precincts do, or by law ought to enjoy, that they be and are hereby obliged to maintain the public worship of God among them, in the support of a learned and orthodox minister."

This Act received the concurrence of the House of Representatives, and was consented to by the Governor on the 7th of the same month, so that the district then became a regularly incorporated precinct. The first precinct meeting was held on the 15th of March, 1743. The object was to choose the necessary precinct officers, to raise money to defray the expenses of their incorporation and to support the preaching of the gospel. For this last purpose they raised forty pounds. Thus, we have the satisfaction of knowing that the first settlers of this town made it their first object to establish and maintain

religious order. Jacob Cummings was the first moderator and he, in connection with Edward Ayres and Joseph Simons, constituted the first precinct committee. On the 28th of the next month a warrant for a meeting was issued in which the precinct was denominated Ware River Precinct, a name by which it was afterwards known until it was incorporated into a town. At this meeting it was voted to hire a Mr. Dickenson to preach until the money granted should be expended. In March, 1744, the sum of sixty pounds was raised for the support of the gospel, and in the course of that year three different persons were employed in this place. The names of these gentlemen were Mills, Rawson and Howe. In the year 1745 Mr. Henry Carey was employed to preach to the inhabitants of the precinct. In November they gave him an invitation to settle with them as their minister, but he declined accepting it. After several unsuccessful attempts in preceding years, the precinct proceeded, in 1750, to erect a house of worship of God, which they placed a few rods south of the centre of the town.

The house then erected was thirty-five feet by twenty-five feet, with fifteen feet posts. It was used until the year 1800, when this commodious house in which we now worship was erected and dedicated to God. In November, 1750, the precinct invited Mr. Grindal Rawson to settle with them as their minister. He accepted their invitation and was ordained on the

9th of May, 1751. The council called on this occasion gathered and organized the church on the day of the ordination. Of how many members the church originally consisted is not known. It must, however, have been but small as it appears that the whole number of members which had been admitted at the time of Mr. Rawson's dismissal, which took place January 19th, 1754, was only 43. Some of them became members by profession and some by letter of recommendation from other churches. Rev. Mr. Rawson, the first pastor of this church, it is supposed, was a native of Hadlyme, Conn. But little is known of him in this place. Traditional accounts represent him as a man of little seriousness, comeliness or refinement. The only relic of his labors I have seen is his answer to the call of the precinct. This, on the whole, manifests a very undue concern about worldly things, and yet some expressions in it seem to intimate that his sentiments were evangelical. For a time (several years) after his dismissal very little interest was taken in the institutions of the gospel. The house of God laid waste ; the ways of Zion mourned ; the people were as sheep scattered upon the mountains, while vice and irreligion prevailed among them. They continued in this destitute state about four years. The great Head of the church then awakened them to feel their need of a spiritual guide. In the Autumn of 1758 the church and precinct called Mr. Ezra Thayer to become their pastor and minister in the

Lord. He accepted their call and was ordained on the 10th of January, 1759. It appears that until this time the church had been destitute of a confession of faith. The ordaining council, therefore, very properly presented one which was unanimously adopted by the church and pastor elect. What sentiments were contained in this confession I am unable to state. Although the prospects of the church were brightened by the settlement of a pastor, there was still in it a lamentable degree of laxity. The half-way covenant was soon adopted, and thus the church became amalgamated with the world. In the course of the Rev. Mr. Thayer's ministry, which continued about sixteen years, seventy-nine members were received as members of the church, in full communion. Four was the greatest number received at any one time. The Rev. Mr. Thayer was a native of Mendon and was graduated at Harvard College in 1756. He is said to have been a man of placid, accommodating turn and to have possessed, in a high degree, the affections and confidence of his people. He died, February 11th, 1775, aged 43. After his death the inhabitants of the town, to manifest their affectionate regard for their deceased pastor, paid the expenses of his funeral and erected the monument that marks the place where his ashes slumber. Early in the year 1762 the precinct was incorporated into a town. The first town meeting was holden on the 9th of March, at which Samuel Sherman, William Brakenridge and John Davis were chosen selectmen.

SCHOOLS.

At a meeting held on the 11th of the same month, the town was divided into four school districts, and twelve pounds were raised for the support of schools. This money was equally divided between the districts and the people of each district were required to expend their proportion within the limits of the year, on penalty of forfeiting their claim. From that time a small sum was raised annually for the support of schools, and houses, soon after, were erected for their accommodation. There are now ten districts, and, for several years past, seven hundred and twenty-five dollars have been raised annually to promote the interests of education. In the village two public schools are taught through the year. There is besides these an infant school. In the center district a school is kept about nine months in the year. Between six and seven hundred children are instructed in the several schools in the Winter seasons. In 1780 the town gave Mr. Winslow Packard an invitation to settle there in the ministry, which he did not accept. It was renewed the following year but was a second time rejected. In 1785 an unsuccessful attempt was made to settle Mr. Jeremiah Hallock. While that man of God was preaching in this place an interesting revival of religion was enjoyed. A few sentences from his diary will at once give some idea of his devotedness and the extent of this

work. On the first Sabbath that he spent in Ware, he thus writes : "Oct. 17th, Sabbath. Spent some "time in meditation and prayer this morning. The "people were very attentive. O, may I never forget "the mercies of the Lord. Had a very full and atten- "tive conference this evening. Had freedom in dis- "course, and so had others. Some appearance of an "awakening. O, may it come on ! O, may it come "on ! Nov. 7th : A remarkable meeting this even- "ing. Some suppose there were three hundred per- "sons present ; was enabled to preach with freedom to "the most affected auditory I ever saw. Feb. 1st : "Visited my pleasant grove and took my farewell of "Ware. I have been there twelve Sabbaths. When I "came the young people were light and gay. But it "has pleased God to awaken them, so that their frolics "are turned into conferences, and to God's name be all "the glory. There are about twelve hopeful converts." This was the first season of refreshing from the Lord enjoyed in this place. About this time and probably as a consequence of the eminently pious influence of Mr. Hallock, the town voted to adopt Doct. Watts' Psalms and Hymns, to be sung in the public congregation. In the Summer of the same year Mr. Benjamin Judd was invited to settle here as a minister of the Cross. He accepted the invitation and was ordained on the 12th of October. The people were not united in calling Mr. Judd to settle with them. Unhappily, difficulties soon arose between the dissenting

party and their pastor, which terminated in his dismissal, on the 28th of September, 1787. In the course of his ministry three persons were added to the church. After his dismissal, the town was destitute of a settled minister for nearly five years, in which time the church received an addition of twelve members. In March, 1792, the church and town unanimously gave Mr. Reuben Moss an invitation to settle with them as their pastor and minister in the Lord. He accepted their invitation and the solemnities of the ordination were attended on the 21st of June. After the settlement of the Rev. Reuben Moss, the church revised their confession of faith. In the revised form it corresponded very exactly in substance with the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, and referred to that as containing a very accurate and useful exposition of the doctrines, ordinances and duties of the Christian religion. This was used until May, 1827, when a confession of faith and covenant, drawn up by a committee of the Brookfield association and adopted by most of the churches in their connection, was unanimously adopted by this church as a substitute for that which had been before used. The leading sentiments in each are the same, though the latter is thought to be the most happily expressed. The Rev. Mr. Moss was a native of Cheshire and was graduated at Yale College in 1787. He pursued his professional studies under the care of the Rev. Dr. Trumbull, of New Haven, Conn. He

continued in the ministry in this place until he rested from his labors, a period of about sixteen years and seven months. During this time he had the satisfaction of seeing fifty persons added to the church, forty-two by profession and eight by recommendations from other churches. He was a man of ardent piety, of refined feelings, and was somewhat distinguished as a biblical scholar. As a preacher he was plain and practical and enforced his instructions by a blameless example. Many will long remember him as the faithful and affectionate friend of the young. In his labors for this class of the community he was indefatigable. He was remarkably particular and felicitous in attention to the district schools. Though at the time of his settlement the schools were in a very low and disordered state, they very soon became very much improved through his attention and influence. By his effort in this department of his labors, he was instrumental in preparing a large number of young men to engage in the instruction of schools in this town and vicinity. By this means he greatly raised the tone of moral feeling and the standard of education among his people. Twice in his ministry he was afflicted with severe turns of derangement. He died, deeply lamented, on the 17th of February, 1809, in the fiftieth year of his age. "The memory of the just is blessed." Soon after the death of the Rev. Mr. Moss, Mr. Samuel Ware was invited to preach in this place and was ordained on the 31st of

October, 1810. He was abundantly blessed in his labors. In the course of his ministry, which continued something more than fifteen years, three extensive revivals of religion were enjoyed and one hundred and ninety-seven members were added to the church, one hundred and seventy-seven of whom were by profession ; the first of these revivals was in 1812, the second in 1815 and the third in 1818. In 1826 Mr. Ware's health became so poor and his constitution so much impaired as to render it necessary that he should recede from his labors in the ministry; accordingly, in April of that year, he made a communication to the church and society to this effect, in which communication he proposed to close his labors by the first of May and to take a dismission at the same time that a minister should be ordained as his successor, and by the council that should be called on that occasion. This proposal was acceded to by the church and society. Perhaps there is no way in which the feelings exercised by the people towards him can be more properly stated than by giving the language in which they have cordially expressed them in the following vote, passed and recorded, July 3d, 1826 :

“Voted, unanimously, that we cordially recommend the Rev. Samuel Ware as an exemplary Christian and an able and judicious and faithful minister of the gospel.”

Few clergymen have retained more perfectly, for a course of years, the confidence and affection of their people. The present pastor, the Rev. Augustus B. Reed, was born, November 19th, 1798, at Rehoboth, and was graduated at Brown University in 1821. He came to this town, at the request of the committee for supplying the pulpit, on the 6th day of May, 1826, and preached his first sermon to this people on the next Sabbath, the Rev. Mr. Ware receding from his labors. On the 19th of June the church and society unanimously invited him to become their pastor. He was solemnly consecrated as the minister of this people on the 19th of July. In September following it became manifest that there was an unusual degree of seriousness on the minds of the people generally, and especially on the minds of the young. Many of the church were brought faithfully to examine themselves and to exercise a spirit of deep humility and earnest prayer. Seasons were observed for fastings and supplications. The Holy Spirit descended and the place appeared filled with the Divine presence. The revival continued, without much abatement of interest, through the succeeding Winter. Many, it is believed, will remember through eternity, with devout gratitude, the earnestness of heaven which were there enjoyed. Between seventy and eighty were numbered as the fruits of this revival, sixty-one of whom became connected with the church in the course of the year. The whole number added to the

church since the settlement of the present pastor are seventy-five, seventy of whom were added by profession.

The whole number of members since the organization of the church, is 475, a majority of whom have closed their pilgrimage and gone to give an account of their stewardship. The whole number of members at this time is 188, of whom 62 are males and 126 females. The number of baptisms that have been administered since the church was formed is 1,022.

The deacons have been as follows :

Jacob Cummings, chosen 1751; died Feb. 27th, 1776.

John Davis, chosen 1751.

Maverick Smith, chosen January 14th, 1768; died Sept. 11th, 1789.

Thomas Jenkins, chosen March 21st, 1768; died March 24th, 1792, aged 81.

William Paige, chosen Sept. 30th, 1789; died Jan. 23d, 1826.

Daniel Gould, chosen Sept. 30th, 1789.

Joseph Cummings, chosen May 11th, 1815; dismissed and recommended to the East Evangelical Church May 7th, 1826.

Eli Snow, chosen May 11th, 1815.

Warner Brown, May 11th, 1826; deposed and suspended April 8th, 1830.

Enos Davis, chosen June 27th, 1830.

During the last forty years the church in Ware has been signally blessed with the Divine presence, and has been distinguished for its firm adherence to "the faith once delivered to the saints." From the first settlement of the town to the present time the inhabitants generally have been of one religious denomination, and until 1825 met together in one place for the worship of God. At that time the population had increased to about 2,000. In consequence of the enterprising and flourishing manufactories erected in the east part of the town, a village had there sprung up as by enchantment, and then contained about one-half of the whole population of the town. It was, therefore, found necessary that a religious society should be formed in that section and that public worship should be there maintained for the accommodation and benefit of the inhabitants of the village. A society was accordingly formed, and in April, 1826, a Congregational church was organized, denominated the East Evangelical Church in Ware. In May of the same year the Rev. Parsons Cook was ordained as pastor of the church. He was born at Hadley, and graduated at Williams College in 1822. They have since been blessed with two extensive and powerful revivals of religion, the fruits of which are manifest in the rapid growth of the church. That church at the last annual report contained 183 members. A spacious and beautiful house for the worship of God was dedicated on the

24th of January, 1827. In January, 1829, the east section, in accordance with the unanimous vote of the town, was incorporated a distinct parish. The division of the town into two churches and parishes took place, not in consequence of any division of feeling, but because it was necessary, in order that the spiritual interests of the town might be most effectually promoted. The most friendly intercourse has been maintained from the beginning between the two churches and parishes. The town, from its first settlement, has been one of the most healthy portions of New England. What number of deaths have occurred since its first settlement it is not possible now to ascertain. The number of deaths in this religious society since my settlement is fifty-six. The average age of those who died in the last two years is forty-eight years eight months. The average age of those who died during the first two years of my ministry was twenty-nine years. In this connection it is worthy of remark that in January, 1826, a temperance association was formed here which now contains about 160 members. In this not an instance of mortality has occurred since its formation. Nor has there been any sickness that may not be traced to some extraordinary cause. We doubt not that posterity will put the question concerning the members of this association: "Our fathers, where are they?" Yet it is undeniable that these facts very strikingly show the tendency of temperance to preserve life and health. Many of the

people of this town have taken a deep and glowing interest in the great objects of Christian enterprise with which the present age is distinguished. There is scarcely any object of this class but what has been aided more or less by their beneficence. In addition to the contributions of this church, we trust that Zion will be aided by the labors of her sons. Four young men, William P. Davis, John Dunbar, Jr., P. Washburn and Isaac Wetherell, who have made profession of their faith, are now pursuing their classical studies with reference to the Christian ministry. May the members of this branch of Zion increase their benefactions until the watchman taught of God shall "speak comfortably to Jerusalem," and say unto her "that her warfare is accomplished." I have now, my dear people, made known to you the deeds of the Lord, the work which God has here wrought.

Do we not in the retrospect find abundant occasion to give thanks unto His name?

We have seen that He preserved our fathers while in the depths of poverty and in the perils of the wilderness. He early led them to His courts, and He has caused the several generations which have here followed each other in rapid succession, to enjoy the blessings of the sanctuary. The hills and dales that formerly presented but a wilderness He has rendered fertile and productive, and a small and sparse population He has increased to thousands. The town

which was formerly proverbial for its poverty He has made now to possess a comfortable share of wealth, and to become one that is, on the whole, second to but few in this section of the Commonwealth, and what is more, He has given incontestable proof in His providence that He has engraven this portion of His Zion on the palms of His hands, and that her walls are continually before Him. He has sent down His Spirit here abundantly to call in His elect, and to prepare them for the glorious inheritance unto which they were appointed in the eternal councils of His will. "O, give thanks unto the Lord ; call upon His name ; make known His deeds among the people." "Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works." "O, praise God in His sanctuary, praise Him in the firmament of His power, praise Him for His mighty acts, praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." Further, while the retrospect which we have taken is calculated to excite within us gratitude to God, does it not also present to our minds weighty reasons why we should call upon His name ? We have seen that generation after generation has gone down to the grave, and but little more is known of their history, than that they once lived and are dead. In this we see, as in a glass, our own nothingness and mortality. "Surely all flesh is as grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field."

Who is the man that can cast his eye over the ages that are past and have swept millions to the tomb and not feel his entire dependence? Where is the man that can take this retrospect of time and not so feel his need of Divine presence and support as will excite him to call upon the name of the Lord? The view which we have here taken of the Providence of God in this place, not only reminds us of our need of the blessing of God, but also affords much encouragement to prayer. He has indeed been the God of our fathers, and even in our own day has He not verified the declaration, "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear?" Be exhorted then to call upon His name, to plead with Him for His name's sake, to remember this part of His heritage, and build it up forever. While you appear before Him be not satisfied with the cold and heartless form of worship, but let your supplications be fervent and spiritual, and let them be offered in that lively faith which lays hold of the horns of the heavenly altar. Then may we trust that in answer to your prayers the blessing of God will descend yet more powerfully, and unborn generations will see greater things than these.

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